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South Korean Dissident Travels to Pyongyang

Illegal Trip Draws Threat of Punishment From Seoul Government

By Peter Maass
Special to The Washington Post

SEOUL, March 26—South Korea's most famous dissident has begun an illegal visit to communist North Korea and may be arrested when he returns to the South, government officials said today.

Moon Ik Kwan, 71, reportedly arrived in the North Korean capital of Pyongyang yesterday via Tokyo, marking the first time that a leading South Korean dissident has visited the northern city since the Korean War ended in 1953. Visits there are prohibited except in rare cases approved by the government.

Moon's visit, which apparently surprised officials here, dominated news broadcasts and drew a quick and harsh response from the government. [A senior South Korean prosecutor was quoted by state radio Sunday as saying that Moon would face legal action under a tough anticommunist law that carries a maximum penalty of death, Reuter reported.]

Though the South and the North are still technically at war, South Korean President Roh Tae Woo said last year that Pyongyang should be viewed as a partner, not as an enemy, and he proposed wide-ranging exchanges. Negotiations have yet to be successful.

As a result of Roh's new policy,



MOON IK KWAN
...may be arrested in South Korea

relations with North Korea have become the focus of intense discussions among many South Koreans, who for decades were legally prohibited from talking about the subject and who have expressed a strong desire for reunification.

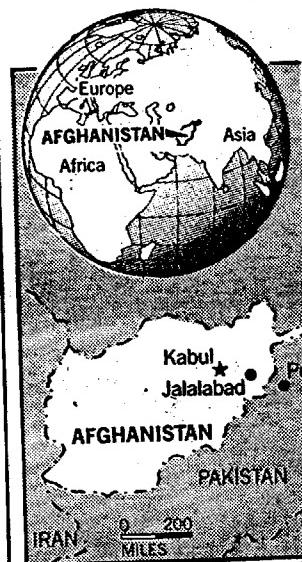
Seoul, with the consent of the main opposition parties, has prohibited dissidents and militant students—who have criticized Roh's efforts as being insincere and weak—from setting up their own channels of contact with the North. Officials have said they fear that independent talks or exchanges could undermine their authority and be manipulated by North Korea to

The government has also deployed police to block illegal prounification marches to the border. [Authorities deployed thousands of riot troops throughout Seoul on Sunday to end antigovernment protests by radical groups, The Associated Press reported. No incidents were reported in Seoul but students were reported to have clashed with riot police in two southern provincial cities.]

Seoul's political reforms include allowing the circulation of some books, photographs and movies about North Korea—all strictly banned until a year ago. The government has also allowed firms here to trade openly with the North, and earlier this year permitted Chung Ju Young, founder of the Hyundai Group, to visit Pyongyang, where he agreed to help develop a tourist area.

The visit by the Princeton-educated Moon, however, goes beyond the bounds of what the government is willing to tolerate. Moon grew up in northern Korea but fled south in the 1940s after his father, a Presbyterian minister, had been jailed twice by the communists.

Moon, frequently jailed in the South during the 1970s and '80s, was invited to Pyongyang earlier this year to participate in talks that North Korea proposed between political leaders from each side. The proposal



Afghan
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Soviet Tank

AFGHAN, From A1

squadron, manned by other Afghan Army tank crew guerrilla trainees.

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Kim Il Sung Sees S. Korean Dissident

Illegal Visit Represents Embarrassment to Government in Seoul

By Peter Maass
Special to The Washington Post

SEOUL, March 28—A South Korean dissident's illegal journey to North Korea turned more controversial today with the disclosure that he has met President Kim Il Sung, whose last reported meeting with a South Korean was in 1972.

The visit to North Korea by dissident leader Moon Ik Kwan, who faces arrest once he returns to Seoul, is breaking a number of taboos, but the meeting with Kim is seen here as particularly explosive. Visits to communist North Korea, technically still at war with South Korea, are banned except in rare cases.

According to North Korean press reports monitored today in Seoul and Tokyo, the Princeton-educated Moon and three traveling companions were at a luncheon given yesterday by Kim, who discussed unification issues with Moon. The press reports did not provide any comments from Moon, 71, a Presbyterian minister who has been jailed often and is one of the father figures of South Korea's dissident movement.

Moon left South Korea early last week for Tokyo and then traveled to Beijing, where the North Koreans reportedly provided a special plane to fly him to Pyongyang on Saturday.

He is expected to return to South Korea before April 14, when his passport expires. He reportedly wants to return via Panmunjom, the

truce village straddling the tense Demilitarized Zone that has divided the Korean peninsula since the war ended in 1953.

Moon worked at Panmunjom, the symbol of the peninsula's division, more than 30 years ago as an interpreter for the U.S. Army during truce talks with North Korea. He was born in northern Korea but fled south in the 1940s after his father was persecuted by the communists.

Moon's trip takes place at one of the most volatile moments so far in South Korea's fragile transition to democracy. Hard-liners in the military and in the government, worried about symptoms of social disorder, are pressing conservative President Roh Tae Woo to crack down on dissent, and they are certain to redouble their efforts in the wake of Moon's meeting with Kim.

A small-scale crackdown already has begun. Police reportedly have seized more than 3,000 copies of pro-North Korean books and arrested 11 publishers in raids last night.

In a possible sign of struggles within the ruling camp, the government announced a shuffle of 49 top generals today, including the sacking of a three-star general who failed to salute Roh at a public ceremony last week. The general's action was widely interpreted as a sign of the unease that hard-line generals are apparently feeling over the political situation in South Korea. Today's shuffle may be a bid to move troublesome officers out of the powerful military, although few details were made available.

Moon's meeting with Kim, shown in a blurred photograph published in South Korean newspapers this afternoon, puts the government in an embarrassing position because of its new policy of encouraging friendlier ties with the North and treating Pyongyang as a partner rather than an enemy. Earlier this year, the government permitted Hyundai founder Chung Ju Young to visit North Korea, and several South Korean journalists have also traveled to the North, although none has met with Kim Il Sung.

The last South Korean whom Kim is known to have met was Lee Hyu Rak, then chief of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, who in 1972 made a secret trip to Pyongyang that opened up a brief period of detente. With the exception of another brief thaw in 1985, the two sides have had hostile relations.

Despite its new policy of openness to the North, the government here has banned independent contacts because it is afraid that North Korea will manipulate people such as Moon to stir up political unrest and undermine its authority. Students and dissidents oppose the government ban, arguing that if Roh can state publicly, as he has, that he will go anywhere at any time to meet Kim Il Sung to promote reunification, then they, too, should be allowed to seek contacts with the North.

South Korea's intelligence community has come under fire for not knowing in advance of Moon's plans to visit the North and failing to block him from doing so.